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Louisiana among top states in access and low college costs

BATON ROUGE – A new national higher education study released today (Jan. 7) ranks Louisiana among the top states to provide access to public colleges and universities.

The study, *Unequal Opportunity*, conducted on 2,800 colleges nationwide by the Indianapolis, Indiana-based Lumina Foundation for Education, was designed to measure access to postsecondary education for traditional and adult student populations across the country according to income levels.

The report highlights the state's college affordability. "Compared with other states, Louisiana's costs of attendance are significantly below average, and this seems to promote access," said Jerry S. Davis, Lumina's Vice President of Research.

"This study sheds a very positive light on postsecondary educational opportunities in Louisiana," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie. "According to the report, Louisiana is a leader in the nation in access to public postsecondary education for most students."

When compared to other states, Louisiana is 3rd highest in the nation in the percentage of public and private institutions that are generally accessible for low-income dependent, full-time undergraduates and 6th highest in the nation in the percentage of public and private institutions that are generally accessible to median-income dependent, full-time students.

The report notes that one of the key factors "in providing broad access to public institutions is the presence of community colleges or other public two-year technical colleges."

"Today, the actual level of access in Louisiana is even greater than reported," Savoie said.

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“This study used data from 1998 and prior years, before the establishment of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and before the full effect of TOPS had begun to be realized.”

The commissioner said Governor Foster, the Legislature, and the Board of Regents have made accessibility to effective and relevant higher education and workforce training a top priority. “Through the implementation of the state’s *Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education* and the continuing development of our emerging community college system,” he said, “issues focusing on affordable student access and increased student success will be even further enhanced.”

Unequal Opportunity recognizes accessibility to postsecondary education as a function of state higher education fiscal policies, institutional admissions policies, and academic and financial differences among prospective students. It does not document student enrollment behavior, such as where students actually attend college, but focuses on the financial environment in which student college decisions are made.

The study is based on 1998 data relative to admissions, enrollment, income and financial aid in each state. It also looks at how those elements affect four student groups – traditional college-age, low- and median-income students dependent upon parents or guardians for support; and nontraditional self-supporting, low- and median-income adults.

“If Louisiana is going to be a competitive state, both economically and socially, we must continue efforts to provide additional levels of education to all of our citizens regardless of economic status,” Savoie stated.